

DHSS and Delaware State Police Warn of Spike in Overdoses in Western Sussex County; Immediate Assistance Available at 911 or DHSS' Crisis Helpline

NEW CASTLE (April 22, 2017) – In the wake of a significant increase in heroin overdoses in western Sussex County, including one that was fatal, from Thursday through early Saturday, health and law enforcement officials are warning users, families, treatment providers and health care professionals of the dangerous spike.

For users and families who want to be connected to treatment immediately, call the Department of Health and Social Services' 24/7 Crisis Helpline at 1-800-345-6785 in Sussex and Kent counties, or 1-800-652-2929 in New Castle County. If individuals see someone overdosing, they should call 911. Under Delaware's 911/Good Samaritan Law, people who call 911 to report an overdoses and the person in medical distress cannot be arrested for low-level drug crimes.

Sergeant Richard D. Bratz, director of the Public Information Office for the Delaware State Police reports that a significant spike of heroin overdoses has occurred over the past several days in Sussex County. The Sussex County Drug Unit is actively investigating and seeking information on any of the drug overdoses. The public is encouraged to call Sergeant M. Dawson of the Sussex County Drug Unit at 302-752-3815 with any information.

Michael Barbieri, director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, alerted treatment providers statewide of the surge in overdoses in western Sussex. Hospitals and urgent care centers were notified of the increase by the Division of Public Health's Emergency Medical Services, which oversees the state's paramedic service. EMS responded to seven reported overdoses in a 24-hour period beginning Thursday in the Seaford and Laurel areas. In several of the cases, paramedics used naloxone, the overdose-reversing medication, to save the individual before transporting each person to the hospital.

"This spike in overdoses is alarming," said Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a family physician and Cabinet Secretary for the Department of Health and Social Services. "Even one use of heroin or another opioid can end a life. For people in active use and their families, please convince your loved ones to seek treatment for their addiction or keep naloxone in your home. Addiction is a disease and treatment does work. Our staff at the DHSS Crisis Helpline will listen and they will connect you to treatment options."

In 2016, 308 people died from overdoses in Delaware, almost triple the number who died in traffic accidents. In 2015, a total of 228 people died from overdoses in Delaware, with 222 overdoses deaths reported in 2014.

Prevention, treatment and recovery information and resources in Delaware and nearby states also are available on DHSS' www.HelpIsHereDE.com website. DHSS will initiate a community outreach campaign in May that will include an unveiling of the revamped website, materials for medical providers on prescribing pain medications, and information on how to screen patients and connect them with addiction treatment resources, as well as materials on preventing substance exposure in infants.

The Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations.